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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 15th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HADID (Algeria)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 125: JOINT INSPECTION UNIT (continued) (A/46/34/; A/47/34 and A/47/755; A/48/34, A/48/83 and Add.1, A/48/129 and A/48/383; A/C.5/45/75 and A/C.5/46/17)

1. Mr. STAVRINOS (Cyprus) said that the report (A/48/34) and the work programme (A/48/129) of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) for 1993 showed many positive changes. He commended the Unit's decision, in conformity with the relevant General Assembly resolutions, to focus in its future work on management, budgetary and administrative issues, operational activities for development, peace-keeping, and humanitarian assistance. He also welcomed the savings achieved through the implementation of JIU recommendations. In addition, he commended the joint meetings and consultations between JIU and the participating organizations and the inclusion of the relevant conclusions in the Unit's work programme. That example should be followed by other United Nations bodies in order to avoid duplication of effort, which inevitably resulted in the waste of valuable resources.

2. His delegation fully supported the recommendations made by JIU in its annual reports, in particular its studies and recommendations on the rationalization of some aspects of peace-keeping operations and on the staffing of United Nations peace-keeping and related missions, expressed its satisfaction at the Unit's studies on the control and limitation of documentation, and reiterated its belief that the Unit's recommendations and proposals on that matter deserved to be fully implemented in the current period of financial difficulties for the Organization. The role of JIU was more important than ever in enhancing the United Nations productivity and saving resources, and its mandate should be strengthened to the fullest possible extent.

3. Mr. CHUINKAM (Cameroon) said that, by adopting a more selective approach in the formulation of its work programme, JIU was finally responding to the concerns of Member States and reorienting its priorities in the light of current world developments. Its reports once again demonstrated what it was capable of doing, given the necessary resources and empowerment.

4. Article 5, paragraph 1, of the Statute of JIU gave the Inspectors "the broadest powers of investigation in all matters having a bearing on the efficiency of the services and the proper use of funds". Paragraph 5 of that article, however, stated, inter alia, that the Inspectors "shall not, however, have the power of decision nor shall they interfere in the operations of the services they inspect". That explained why the United Nations system was so slow in following up the Unit's recommendations regarding the performance and results of United Nations programmes.

5. His delegation regretted that the executive heads of the participating agencies had not made their comments on the JIU reports known in more timely fashion so that they could be considered by the governing bodies concerned. The General Assembly should, at its current session, address the issues raised in the JIU report (A/48/34), in particular paragraphs 38, 39 and 40.

(Mr. Chuinkam, Cameroon)

6. The report on accountability and oversight in the United Nations Secretariat (A/48/420) was not only timely but highly relevant. It demonstrated that the existing oversight mechanisms lacked power, independence and financial and human resources and proposed the establishment of an Office of Accountability and Oversight. The Secretary-General, for his part, had established the Office of Inspections and Investigations, which incorporated all the existing oversight units. It would appear that the problems of fraud, mismanagement of resources and inefficiency that plagued the Organization stemmed from a lack of oversight mechanisms.

7. In his delegation's view, neither the consolidation of the existing oversight units into a single unit nor the creation of a new unit would resolve the situation. What was needed was simply to enhance the authority and resources of the existing oversight mechanisms, which had been created to perform the functions that any new unit would be expected to perform. To be effective, the oversight units must have the power to impose penalties. However, it would appear that neither Member States nor the Secretary-General were genuinely interested in remedying the current deficiencies.

8. Mr. DONNELLY (United States of America) expressed his delegation's concern that the limited impact of the work of JIU on the agencies and programmes of the United Nations system had led Member States to regard the issue as of secondary importance. The Unit's weaknesses, the lack of attention by Member States and the limited cooperation of the participating agencies and programmes led to the conclusion that a fundamental change was needed in the United Nations machinery for inspection and evaluation. The United States had carefully examined the possibility of establishing an office of Inspector General for the United Nations, whose mandate would contain the elements required to ensure that Secretariat officials cooperated fully in all inspections and evaluations, that the recommendations of the Inspector General were implemented and that the General Assembly annually reviewed meaningful reports on the results of the Inspector General's work.

9. Although the United States regretted that JIU had not been more effective, it found many of its reports extremely useful. In that connection, it welcomed the report on accountability and oversight in the United Nations Secretariat (A/48/420) and requested that the Secretary-General's comments on that report should be issued as soon as possible so that it could be fully reviewed by the Fifth Committee.

10. It was a matter for concern that, despite several years of work in the General Assembly to make JIU more effective, the desired results had not been achieved. The Unit itself, Member States and the participating agencies were all responsible for that situation. The oversight function assigned to JIU had not been carried out as effectively as it should have been. Some of the Unit's reports did not appear to be relevant to the work of a number of United Nations agencies or to the concerns of Member States, and not all the Inspectors appeared to meet the qualifications established by the statute of JIU.

11. Member States were in large measure responsible for that state of affairs. The Fifth Committee had deferred the adoption of substantive measures on the item at its two previous sessions and other intergovernmental bodies had tended

(Mr. Donnelly, United States)

to overlook the Unit's reports. Although some steps had been taken to implement the repeated resolutions of the General Assembly aimed at reversing that trend, his delegation did not believe that the Unit's reports had had any greater impact on intergovernmental decision-making.

12. There had been a lack of cooperation between JIU and many United Nations agencies and programmes. In some instances, officials of United Nations agencies had refused to provide the Inspectors with the information they required for their studies. Another serious problem was the delay in receiving the comments of the agencies and programmes on the Unit's reports. What was worse, many JIU reports and recommendations were completely ignored by United Nations agencies. For example, JIU had carried out a number of studies of United Nations programme performance evaluation systems and had repeatedly found serious weaknesses in those systems. Its conclusions had been shared by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) and the Board of Auditors. The absence of progress in the implementation of the JIU recommendations had led one Inspector to conclude that the Unit should do no further work on the subject.

13. He referred to the weaknesses in the functioning of JIU noted by the Advisory Committee in document A/47/755. First, ACABQ had noted the absence of a formal set of inspection standards agreed between the Unit and the participating agencies, which was essential to ensure better compliance by participating agencies with all facets of the Unit's work. Second, ACABQ had concluded that the Unit was devoting too much of its resources to research rather than its primary functions of inspection and evaluation. Third, ACABQ had concluded that it was virtually impossible to quantify the rate of implementation of the Unit's recommendations; part of the problem resulted from the vagueness and generality of many of the recommendations.

14. The estimated savings resulting from the implementation of the recommendations of JIU, as noted by its Chairman, sounded impressive, but his delegation would like to know the data and the methodology used to arrive at those figures.

15. Mr. MORCZYNSKI (Poland) said that the Polish delegation took note of what JIU had done and planned to do in order to improve its response to the requirements stated by Member States and the secretariats of the organizations of the United Nations system. It hoped that in the future JIU would concentrate its limited resources exclusively on the most relevant inspection and evaluation reports and gradually phase out research studies.

16. When deciding on its work programme for 1994 and beyond, the Unit must make sure that the programme properly reflected the major concerns of Member States and the secretariats. It should report on specific managerial problems and relate them to various areas of the work of the organizations, with a view to protecting their assets and improving their operations, and it must avoid general problems of a political nature. Some of the topics in the work programme did not fully meet those criteria.

17. The Polish delegation commended the Unit for initiating an analysis of the economic impact of its recommendations and thought that it should take things

(Mr. Morczynski, Poland)

further and establish a coherent, transparent and workable system to measure the impact of all its recommendations.

18. Member States also had an important role to play in the revitalization of JIU. It would be a great help to the Unit if it received guidance and comments on its work programmes and, above all, if it obtained responses to its specific requests that it should inspect or investigate a given problem, institution or programme.

19. One thing which JIU could do to help Member States was to examine the administrative and financial aspects of peace-keeping operations, such as the introduction of a consolidated peace-keeping budget and the rotation of troop contingents, or even some of the technical aspects of a special scale of assessments for funding peace-keeping operations. It would also be useful to have JIU reports identifying activities which were obsolete, only marginally useful or ineffective. In a number of resolutions the General Assembly stipulated that such an exercise should be a constant part of programming, budgeting and medium-term planning in the United Nations.

20. The selection and appointment of inspectors was the exclusive responsibility of Member States, and the procedure had improved in recent years as a result of the consultations on the selection of inspectors. The regulations governing the appointment of inspectors were valid and there was no need to change them. However, the requirements concerning professional competence and knowledge of the United Nations system - not to mention drafting ability - could be made more demanding. But that would mean taking up the idea of holding public hearings in the Fifth Committee of candidates for appointment as inspectors.

21. Mr. LOZINSKY (Russian Federation) said that the Russian delegation had carefully studied the JIU report and noted with satisfaction the Unit's intention to concentrate its efforts on four interrelated areas: management, budgetary and administrative issues; operational activities for development; peace-keeping; and humanitarian assistance (A/48/34, para. 32). That illustrated the new order of priorities adopted by the Unit in order to help the Organization to adapt to a constantly changing world.

22. The work done by JIU in the period under review was certainly impressive in terms of quantity, but the most important thing at present was not the volume of documentation produced - 28 reports and notes - but rather its impact in terms of improving the work of the Organization.

23. The Unit was right to have focused its attention on peace-keeping operations, for peacemaking operations had become a priority for the United Nations, and the attention of the world community was focused on them. Their implementation required an enormous volume of human and material resources. It would therefore be useful for JIU to make a study of the various aspects of such operations in order to secure an overall improvement and increased efficiency. JIU ought to consider the participation of other international organizations in peace-keeping operations and the possibility of coordinating their efforts for

(Mr. Lozinsky, Russian Federation)

the sake of greater productivity. The Unit's determination to continue its work on measures to improve its methodology and enhance the efficiency of its work was also to be commended.

24. Because of its unique character the Unit was one of the few inter-agency organs of the common system, and therefore one of its main goals should be to enhance the efficiency of every element of the system and provide support to the Administrative Committee on Coordination and its Chairman, the Secretary-General.

25. Mr. ZEVELAKIS (Greece) said that, since the Committee had before it the JIU reports issued over the past three years, the moment was opportune to reflect on the Unit's compliance with the resolutions of the General Assembly and on its output and cost-effectiveness over a fairly long period and to consider whether there had been any progress.

26. There were two specific points of particular interest with regard to compliance. The first related to the nature of the Unit's work, for in resolution 45/237 the General Assembly had encouraged it to give greater attention to management, budgetary and administrative issues. The Greek delegation noted with satisfaction that there had been some progress in that area: in 1991-1993 28 reports and notes had been issued, of which 17 were concerned with investigation, inspection and evaluation, and 11 were research studies.

27. The second point was referred to in resolution 47/201 in which the General Assembly invited the Unit, in drawing up its work programme for 1993 and its preliminary work programme for 1994-1995, to make proposals to reflect the recommendations of ACABQ. The outline of the JIU work programme contained in document A/49/129 deserved mention in that connection.

28. The Unit's output - nine reports a year, many of which required months of research and were particularly relevant - was considerable, especially in the light of its limited resources.

29. With respect to cost effectiveness, which was ultimately the most important criterion for determining the usefulness of a body whose purpose, according to its statute, was to improve management, his delegation thought that the $75 million saved by implementing the recommendations made by JIU between 1985 and 1992 was quite considerable compared with the $24 million required for the Unit's operating costs over the same period. He also expressed appreciation for the report on managing works of art in the United Nations (A/48/72), which had led to the adoption of draft resolution A/C.5/48/L.2 and thus to long overdue action on an issue of great cultural and financial importance.

30. Mr. AL JAWARNEH (Jordan) said that JIU seemed to have changed its approach, and to have focused on inspection, investigation and evaluation in accordance with the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session, particularly those which had taken into account the comments made by ACABQ. The reports prepared by JIU were generally more concrete and specific, for example, the report on the civilian component of peace-keeping operations (A/48/421) and the report on accountability and oversight in the United Nations

(Mr. Al Jawarneh, Jordan)

Secretariat (A/48/420). Delegations should give thorough consideration to those issues if they were to improve the administration and use of financial and human resources.

31. Coordination and cooperation between JIU and the participating agencies was imperative, and it was equally important to ensure that the recommendations accepted by those agencies were implemented.

32. Jordan had always been concerned to enhance the administrative and financial efficiency of the United Nations, and it considered cooperation and coordination between advisory and inspection bodies to be very important. It was essential to differentiate between internal and external oversight functions and to emphasize the importance of coordination, cooperation and integration, which were more than ever necessary. Another important issue was the independence and effectiveness of those bodies. Jordan believed that inspection bodies should be independent and effective and that external bodies such as JIU and the Board of Auditors should continue to perform an important and delicate function in the area of accountability and oversight, also with respect to internal units such as the Office of Inspections and Investigations recently established by the Secretary-General. It also believed that, in order to obtain positive results, the units responsible for accountability and oversight should be strengthened. It was, moreover, essential to strengthen JIU, improve its administration and enhance its efficiency so that it could carry out its mandate.

33. Mr. ELZIMAITY (Egypt) said that JIU, as an independent, system-wide inspection, investigation and evaluation body, should be strengthened to enable it to achieve the goals set forth in articles 5 and 6 of its statute. He therefore urged the Inspectors to continue to provide an independent view that would help not only to improve management efficiency but also to increase coordination within the United Nations system and guarantee the proper use of resources.

34. His delegation had carefully studied the report on the staffing of United Nations peace-keeping and related missions (A/48/421), and it commended the Unit on that timely undertaking. Much remained to be done, however, in order to adjust to the new realities.

35. With respect to the report on accountability and oversight in the United Nations Secretariat (A/48/420), he noted with concern that JIU had found the four internal oversight bodies - the Internal Audit Division, the Central Evaluation Unit, the Central Monitoring Unit and the Management Advisory Service - to be seriously deficient owing to a lack of resources and support. Those four bodies should be strengthened and given the support and resources they needed before any thought was given to the adoption of further measures that would only lead to the creation of additional bodies, possibly with the same shortcomings.

36. He welcomed the Secretary-General's initiative in appointing an Assistant Secretary-General to head the independent Office of Inspections and Investigations, which would incorporate the principal existing oversight units. Given adequate staffing and financial resources, the new Office could help to

(Mr. Elzimaity, Egypt)

reduce the deficiencies in the current oversight, accountability, internal control and management improvement processes and to produce substantial gains in efficiency and effectiveness. However, if it was to be effective, it should be independent of management, but not of the Secretary-General. It was essential to redefine the role of monitoring, in order to ensure the proper use of resources, and the role of evaluation, so as to ensure the relevance of activities and to assess the extent to which they reflected the priorities and needs of Member States, as set forth for the most part in the medium-term plan.

37. With respect to the recommendations in the report on accountability (A/48/420) concerning the possibility of establishing a higher level post with broader audit, evaluation and investigation authority, his delegation considered the new Office of Inspections and Investigations to be the best solution; that meant that it would support the first option in the report. The more complicated second option was unnecessary; before any thought was given to the adoption of further measures, it was essential to give the new Office sufficient time and resources. As long as the Organization was under financial constraints because of the late payment of assessed contributions by some Member States, it was difficult to imagine how the second option could work and achieve satisfactory results. Indeed, the only result of the adoption of the second option would be an increase in the Organization's bureaucracy.

38. With regard to the review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations, Egypt fully supported the recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) that a new system of accountability and responsibility for programme managers should be established by 1 January 1995. It firmly believed there was an urgent need for such a system.

39. Mr. KULEBA (Ukraine) said that his delegation shared the view of JIU that some of its reports dealt with subjects which were not only topical and of system-wide interest, but were also of a nature likely to lead to substantial cost savings for the Member States and/or could result in the improvement of management efficiency and use of resources by the participating organizations (A/48/34, para. 28). In that connection, it believed that the reports on such issues as the improvement of peace-keeping operations, managing works of art in the United Nations and the decentralization of the organizations within the United Nations system were very positive.

40. One important aspect of the work of JIU was its close cooperation with other financial and administrative units which performed similar functions, such as ACABQ, the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) and CPC, which had resulted in considerable savings in such areas as translation, travel expenses and communications. That was further proof of the Unit's ability to mobilize unutilized resources and to take advantage of available options. On the other hand, his delegation agreed with those who thought that JIU could do a lot more on a broader range of programmes. Given the current conditions, JIU should keep its focus on the practical implementation of its recommendations and work more closely with those to whom its recommendations were directed. In the view of his delegation, JIU could make a substantial contribution to the elaboration of effective mechanisms to control the growth of expenses for outside consultants. Audits and reviews should also be carried out at the appropriate time. In

(Mr. Kuleba, Ukraine)

general, JIU should be able to make a greater contribution to improving the efficiency of the activities of the United Nations system.

41. His delegation supported the choice by JIU of the following priority areas for its work programme for 1994-1995: management, budgetary and administrative issues; operational activities for development; peace-keeping; and humanitarian assistance. It believed that if the Unit's potential was to be fully utilized, those priorities should be implemented. In conclusion, he hoped that the future activities of JIU would help the Organization to find a common solution to its most urgent financial problems.

42. Mr. MERIFIELD (Canada) recalled that in its statement on the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations, Canada had commended JIU for its analysis of the need for an appropriate system of performance evaluation for Professional staff, especially for senior officials. In order to help the Secretariat establish such a system, JIU could study the practices of United Nations agencies, the private sector and Governments. As to the question of the participation of civilians in peace-keeping operations, JIU should be asked to work with the Secretariat to determine the cost-effectiveness of the various options for staffing the operations, especially the benefits of using the roster of candidates and subcontractors rather than seconding United Nations staff, which was expensive and had a negative impact on other programmes.

AGENDA ITEM 168: PERSONNEL QUESTIONS (A/C.5/48/5)

43. Mr. ABDELRAHMAN (Sudan) observed that in the note relating to privileges and immunities of officials of the United Nations and the specialized agencies and related organizations (A/C.5/48/5), it was stated in annex II, section E, paragraph 3, that the Government of the Sudan imposed a national compulsory contribution on United Nations officials. That question had been raised in the past and the Sudan had undertaken to correct the situation. It had complied with its promise and circulated a letter regarding the pertinent decision of the Government to all embassies, and thus far had not received any complaint of a failure to comply with that decision. A memorandum had also been sent to the Secretariat that was to have been circulated as an official document of the General Assembly. There was therefore no reason to reopen without cause a question that had already been resolved.

44. Mr. HUTCHESSON (Australia) said that his delegation supported General Assembly resolution 47/28 on the item under consideration, strongly deploring the unprecedented number of fatalities among the United Nations personnel, including those engaged in peace-keeping operations, and condemning the disregard for Article 105 of the Charter displayed by some Member States.

45. Australia welcomed the fact that more attention was being given to that important issue and that, for instance, an open-ended working group had been established in the Sixth Committee to draft a convention on the matter. The report of the Secretary-General on security of United Nations operations (A/48/349-S/26358) and Security Council resolution 868 (1993) were also significant steps in addressing the problem of the safety of United Nations personnel. His delegation looked forward with interest to the proposals which,

(Mr. Hutchesson, Australia)

at the request of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC), the Secretary-General would submit during the current session for improving the security of all United Nations staff, both at Headquarters and in the field. However, given the disturbing picture painted in annexes I and II of the note (A/C.5/48/5), the only possible conclusion was that much more remained to be done.

46. His Government extended its sincere condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of all personnel killed while carrying out their duties. It also reiterated its condemnation of incidents in which other United Nations staff had disappeared or had been attacked or detained. Australia called on all Governments to protect and respect the privileges and immunities of United Nations officials, and itself undertook to continue working closely with interested Governments to adopt measures dealing with all aspects of the problem.

47. Mr. KHANAL (Nepal) paid tribute to the United Nations staff who had lost their lives while performing their duties, and favoured all necessary measures to enhance the security of United Nations personnel. Member States must respect the provisions of the Charter and of the relevant international law, and the working conditions of every United Nations unit must be monitored and evaluated regularly to ensure the safety of all personnel.

48. As to the conditions of service, an equitable career development system and a realistic incentive system had to be established. In addition, women must be ensured representation at the highest decision-making levels, and the principle of equitable geographical distribution of posts must be respected.

49. His delegation supported the Secretary-General's proposal to develop a mechanism to improve and update the skills of the staff of the Organization. Training was a crucial factor in promoting qualified personnel, and Nepal supported the execution of a comprehensive management development programme organized to enhance the leadership and managerial capability of United Nations staff. It was unfortunate that at a time when the Organization needed to be more efficient than ever, the Secretary-General had found himself compelled to point out that the conditions of service in the United Nations were deteriorating and were no longer competitive vis-à-vis the outside labour market and other international organizations.

50. Ms. SHEAROUSE (United States of America) said that her delegation was appalled at the violent deaths and the high number of detentions and abductions of staff members of the United Nations and the specialized agencies. It was the responsibility of Member States to ensure the security and protection of United Nations personnel, and they must support the efforts of the Secretary-General to locate staff reported as missing and to secure the release of those detained. Only the concerted efforts of Member States would guarantee that the privileges and immunities of United Nations personnel were respected.

51. Security Council resolution 868 (1993) and the new item in the Sixth Committee relating to attacks on personnel demonstrated the heightened commitment within the Organization to protecting the security of its staff. Her delegation was pleased that the United Nations Security Coordinator was now at

(Ms. Shearouse, United States)

the Under-Secretary-General level and it agreed that security matters must be an integral part of the planning for each peace-keeping operation; but it was concerned that the Secretary-General had in his report (A/48/349) said that additional resources would be required to implement those new measures. It therefore requested further details, including justification of the need for additional resources and how such costs would be distributed among the United Nations agencies and programmes.

52. In previous statements, the United States had raised the issues of the need to respect the right of all detained staff to receive adequate medical care and to be informed of the reason for their detention; to maintain a legal link with the detained staff member through continued renewal of contract until the case was resolved; to facilitate the reintegration of detained staff into the United Nations community; and to take into consideration the needs of the families of missing or detained staff. Since those humanitarian measures had not been addressed, her delegation would appreciate information regarding those matters.

53. With reference to section IV of the note of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/48/5), the restrictions the United States applied on private travel of United Nations officials did not impede their ability to accomplish their work. The United States was honouring its obligations as host country and had always allowed staff members on official business the freedom to do their work, but that in no way contradicted its inherent right to take the necessary steps to safeguard its national security. The United States believed that the question should be dealt with when the report of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country was considered and therefore recommended that it should be discussed only in the Sixth Committee.

54. Mr. MADDENS (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the member countries of the European Union, said that violation of the privileges and immunities of United Nations officials was a major obstacle to the conduct of missions and the execution of programmes of the agencies and organizations of the United Nations system. It was basically the responsibility of the Governments of Member States to guarantee that the relevant provisions were respected, as set out in Article 105 of the Charter and in the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. It was intolerable that even though all Member States had concurred in the adoption of General Assembly resolution 47/28, staff members continue to be killed while carrying out their duties.

55. The European Union recognized the importance of ensuring the security of all staff members of the United Nations system who worked in increasingly dangerous and precarious situations, and fully associated itself with the tribute paid by the Secretary-General to the staff members who had died while performing their duties. Unfortunately, Mr. Alec Collett appeared for the eighth year in a row on the list of staff members who had been arrested or detained or had disappeared. Needless to say, that was not the only case that was of concern to the European Union. All cases were important, and it therefore appealed to the Governments concerned to stop violating the privileges and immunities of international civil servants. Furthermore, it reaffirmed its support for the efforts of the Secretary-General to guarantee the security of United Nations personnel and offered it unconditional cooperation.

56. Mr. RAZI (Afghanistan) said that his delegation fully shared the Secretary-General's concern regarding the privileges and immunities of United Nations officials and the concern of the staff representatives of the Secretariat with regard to the security and safety of such personnel. Member States had an obligation to ensure the security of United Nations staff and offices, in close cooperation with the local United Nations authorities.

57. Paragraph 6 of the Secretary-General's note (A/C.5/48/5) mentioned the killing of United Nations officials working on humanitarian projects in Afghanistan. His country had already communicated its deep condolences to the United Nations and its related agencies; that sad incident, which had cost the lives of innocent people, was a tragedy which should be seen in the framework of the history of foreign aggression in Afghanistan and the interference by some circles in its internal affairs. The deaths were a direct legacy of the 14 years of war imposed by foreigners on the Afghan nation, which had cost the lives of 1.7 million people.

58. Besides making every effort to protect the lives of all foreigners, and especially those of United Nations officials, Afghanistan planned to sign the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons, including Diplomatic Agents. Moreover, to restore and maintain law and order and to prevent the repetition of such brutal and unnecessary incidents, it had already sent a high-level assessment team to the region where the incident had taken place. It hoped that the team would complete its findings in the near future and it would then address all the problems accordingly.

59. With regard to the balanced and equitable representation of staff of the United Nations system, which was one of the most important issues of principle guaranteed under the United Nations Charter, he said that, despite many efforts the situation had not improved sufficiently to ensure the interests of each Member State. The number of staff from unrepresented or underrepresented countries should be increased, albeit with due regard for the principle of efficiency and integrity. It was the expectation of Afghanistan, as an underrepresented country, that the Secretariat would give due consideration to its candidates.

60. Mr. KEBEDE (Ethiopia), referring to the staff members who, according to the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/48/5), were being detained in Ethiopia, said, with regard to Mr. Andualem Zeleke, an official of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), that the relevant authorities had informed his delegation that his detention had been by order of the special procurator's office, pending an investigation into his alleged involvement in the "red terror" campaign of the defunct regime.

61. As for the alleged detention of Mr. Kassu Asgedon, an official of the World Food Programme (WFP), no complaint or communications had been received in that connection from the Regional Office of WFP in Addis Ababa. The Ethiopian authorities would remain seized of the matter and would report any new developments to the Secretariat. Ethiopia would continue to abide by international law to guarantee the privileges and immunities of officials of the United Nations and the specialized agencies and related organizations.

62. Ms. STUDE (Finland), speaking on behalf of the five Nordic countries, said that they continued to give their full support to the Secretary-General in his efforts to ensure respect for the privileges and immunities of officials of the United Nations and the specialized agencies and related organizations. During the period covered by the Secretary-General's note on the matter, the safety of United Nations personnel had continued to deteriorate. It was highly alarming that the number of staff members under arrest, in detention or missing was increasing each year, as was the number of fatalities among United Nations personnel in the performance of their duties. During the previous year, 150 peace-keepers and civilian staff members, including nationals of the Nordic countries had lost their lives.

63. In the past, to serve under the United Nations flag and to wear a blue helmet had been an unwritten guarantee of protection. That was no longer so; sometimes United Nations service was difficult and dangerous, as evidenced by a number of recent examples. That was particularly the case when United Nations personnel operated in areas where there was no Government or where the Government was not capable of meeting its obligations.

64. The increase in the number of incidents involving the violation of the security and safety of officials had raised the awareness of Member States, especially with regard to staff working in perilous and hostile regions. Measures had already been taken to improve the situation, for example Security Council resolution 868 (1993) and the inclusion in the agenda of the General Assembly of a new item concerning responsibility for attacks on United Nations personnel. The Nordic countries strongly supported the efforts of the Working Group established by the Sixth Committee to study that issue.

65. In the view of the Nordic countries, it was of the utmost importance that the United Nations and its Member States should take practical measures and create mechanisms to enhance respect for the privileges and immunities of officials of the United Nations and the specialized agencies and related organizations. The Nordic countries reiterated that the primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel lay with the host Government and they appealed to the Governments concerned to respect their international obligations.

66. Ms. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) said that her delegation had not spoken on agenda item 168 (Personnel questions) because, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 46/220, it had been decided to consider the item in even years. Her delegation was somewhat dismayed that in practice the resolution was not being complied with: one aspect of personnel questions - that relating to privileges and immunities - was under consideration, while other aspects of the matter, such as the composition of the Secretariat and the situation of women in the Secretariat, which in her delegation's view were of great importance, were being set aside. The subject of the safety of personnel should be dealt with in the Sixth Committee, in view of the complex legal ramifications involved in some aspects of the matter, such as the links with some Security Council resolutions. She also wished to know how the proposal to take up the matter during the current session had originated.

67. The SECRETARY said that, when the work of the Fifth Committee was being organized, some delegations had criticized the Secretariat for not including personnel questions in the agenda. The General Assembly had decided, in resolution 47/226, to establish an open-ended Working Group of the Fifth Committee to consider the formula for the determination of equitable geographical representation in the Secretariat. The Working Group had decided to submit a report to the Fifth Committee during the current session. That decision had prompted the Secretary-General to recommend that the General Assembly should include personnel questions in the agenda. To avoid complicating the work of the Fifth Committee, and bearing in mind the adoption of resolution 46/220, the report of the Secretary-General's on the privileges and immunities of officials had been included under agenda item 128 (United Nations common system). When the General Assembly had decided to include personnel questions in the agenda, however, consideration of the report had been transferred to the item under consideration.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.